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Editorial

Our Approaching 40th Birthday

Our Newsletter's 40th Birthday in December this year must be celebrated in a special way. I suggest that some of you who can capture the right mood and the right memory, send me appropriately 300 words on what you consider has been one of your most exciting experiences in the world of birds. If we can procure a dozen of such contributions, it will make the November/December 1999 issue something of a treasure of the last two milleniums.

To give you an idea of the sort of contribution I have in mind, I report one of my own experiences. Yours may be more exciting.

The deadline is 15th October, but don't wait until you are on the brink. Please send me this piece at your earliest convenience.



Round the Bend in Borivili

In the 1960's the Borivili Reserved Forest skirting the Powai, Vihar and Tulsi lakes was our favourite birding area. One spot which was always productive was a sharp bend on the hill followed by a steep gradient descending to the level of the lake. From this point you could get a view of an evergreen stretch of forest on your left, of a wooded area of teak and other tall trees below you, and in the far distance a sight of the lake with a meadow in the foreground. I wrote about this extraordinary habitat, comprising of an evergreen biotope, tropical woodland and a wetland contiguous to one another, in my Birdwatchers' Diary in the Times of India.

One day when I stopped at the curve, the view and the sounds were unforgettable. I think it was in February when a light mist covered the jungle, increasing one's desire to see what it hid. A jungle owl (*Glaucidium radiatum*) called loud and clear - *kow kuck, kow kuck, kow kuck*. Simultaneously, the greater racket tailed drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) joined with its stentorian chatter. But what was music to my ears was the well described 'Bob-o-link' and 'kokila' calls of the tree pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) which was close by, as these two species so often are. How should one describe the soft, liquid 12 note song of the spotted babbler, but a troop in the scrub provided the ideal background music for the harsh calls of the Corvidae mentioned above.

I could not have asked for more evidence of biodiversity, a word unknown 30 years ago, but as I proceeded downhill I saw an osprey plunge into the lake and emerge with a catch in its claws. A sight to remember. A furlong away was a stream bordered by large Jamun and Karanj trees (the karanj well named nala-madi - meaning in the stream). A Tickell's blue flycatcher moved around restlessly emitting its merry jingling song.

But then the sight which predominated over even these delightful memories is of the paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) with its long white streamers weaving in and out of the dark foliage. It is described as a fairy, not only because of its physical loveliness, but because its movements, in plain language, have an ethereal quality.



Max Nicholson

One of the founders of the conservation movement, together with Sir Julian Huxley and Sir Peter Scott, Max Nicholson in his mid-90s is still active. During my tenure in IUCN (1967-1973) I met Max quite often. He came to Kihim after the IUCN General Assembly meeting in New Delhi in December 1969. He stayed in Salim Ali's hut (in Salim Ali's absence), and I recall him saying that he considered it a great privilege to stay there. Nicholson undertook a pioneering study in England on heronries and the effects of water pollution on birds. He has always insisted that National Parks must be used as tools for land use planning in the country as a whole. The basic idea behind the national park movement is to understand the workings of nature so that we do not unnecessarily take up an adversarial role with the natural world. I doubt if our Administrators have learnt any lessons from their visits to our protected areas as they seem juxtaposed with landscape overused and misused across the frontier about which little is done.

In a recent publication: IUCN'S 50 years, Max has written a short article in which he refers to the influence of birds on his life.

"Born in the country beneath hills and near the sea in Ireland, but in a purely English family, I first came to England as a young stranger to its unfamiliar environment. I was constantly on the move, and my frustrated need to belong was eventually satisfied by an attachment to birds, which mercifully stayed with me wherever I went. While I duly learnt at school about human affairs and thoughts, my close bird companions, with their quicker reactions and in some ways superior capacities, gave me a different perspective."



A New Wildlife Service ?

From time to time conservationists in India, frustrated by the ecological degradation around them, believe that the creation of a special Wildlife Service is the answer, and the present Forest Service which places a priority on collecting revenue from major and minor forest projects, is not the best custodian of India's animals and birds. I reproduce in this issue a note by Admiral MP Avati, who recommends the creation of a new service.

When I was Hon. Sec. of the BNHS from 1962-1974 some members of the Executive Committee were also of this view, and a meeting was held in Delhi (if I remember right at the instance of the Planning Commission) to discuss this proposal. Members of the Forest Service who participated in the discussion were understandably against it. Nobody wants to abdicate power and privilege voluntarily. But a cogent argument against a special service was put forward by General Sir Harold Williams. He said that two services (the present Forest Service and the new Wildlife Service) operating in the same area would lead to conflict and confusion. This view prevailed and it was decided to establish a Wildlife Wing within the Forest Department so that our Sanctuaries and National Parks could be looked after by Foresters of this Wing after receiving training at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun. S.G. Neginhal and others,

though members of the Forest Service, have played an important part in conservation after they received training under this scheme. But the fact remains, that conservation is not a discrete discipline un-connected with other activities. It is an attitude of mind which should pervade all our actions. Buildings can merge with the surroundings or be a blot on the landscape, roads can be so designed that they protect the adjoining embankments or accelerate rain water run-off and soil erosion. Indeed every human activity if undertaken with ecology in mind can possibly be eco-friendly.

But our main problem is not that we are ignorant about environmental matters. By now we have learnt a great deal, but unless our Decision Makers begin to love the natural environment, as we birdwatchers do, the damage will continue. We must take much more trouble to educate our Masters, difficult though the task is. We must also attempt to establish lasting contacts with officials in Government who are concerned with large scale projects. When we look back over the past decade or two about what has been achieved in conservation it has been almost entirely through personal approaches to people in power - not because of the laws and Conventions which have come into being.



Cattle Egrets Turn Tractor Egrets

Cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) are so called because of their close association with cattle. As the cattle move around, a variety of insects disturbed by the animals fly up from the ground and are preyed upon by the birds. But with the mechanization of agriculture, the birds have begun to follow tractors. In a semi-mechanized sewage irrigated agricultural farm in Bikaner (NW Rajasthan) in September 1998 a flock of 45 odd cattle egrets moved with the tractors in the field. As soon as the machines were started the birds gathered near the tractor in anticipation of its movement. But the interesting fact pointed out by Dr. M.M. Saxena ('The Roost', 7-P-3, Pawanpuri (South), Bikaner 334 003) is that they did not follow the tractor as long as the disc-harrows were above the ground (as this would have been pointless from their point of view). But as soon as the harrow was lowered into the ground, the birds chased the tractor and picked up food from the moist soil.



Vagrant Birds

From time to time I get reports about the presence of unlikely species of birds from various areas. If the information supplied about the physical appearance and behaviour seems credible I decide to publish the note, and so I publish in this issue the note on the ortolan bunting by Mayur Mistry, though it has been reported only twice from Gilgit, once from Kashmir and once from Delhi. I think it was Peter Jackson, who saw it in Delhi. The presence of the bird in S.W. Rajasthan is not impossible if it once visited Delhi.

Similarly very detailed physical description (which I have not reproduced) has been supplied by the authors with regard to the hill blue flycatcher (*Cyornia banyumas*), formerly named large-billed blue flycatcher (*Muscicapa banyumas*). Amateurs

have often reported new discoveries from the field, as in the case of the school boy who noticed that only pigeons and doves drink like a horse (sucking the liquid) while other birds have to throw up their heads backwards to allow the liquid to

trickle down their throats. And I often find that wrong information is useful, as it leads to a lively debate as in the case of the Japanese cormorants pointed out by Sujan Chatterjee in this issue.



A Visit to Pondicherry University Campus, Birding in Javvadi Hills, Comments on NLBW and Shrikes

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A visit to the Pondicherry University Campus

It was a pleasure being back at the Pondicherry University Campus on a brief visit (from 27-30 April, 1999), especially as I got to stay on the campus. I could therefore find some time to go around watching birds and looking at the habitat changes in the campus.

Needless to say it was hot and humid. However the onset of sea breeze in the afternoon provided some relief. The campus looked a lot more green than what it was a few years ago. The avenue trees have come up well, although it is unfortunate that several exotic *Acacias* have been planted. A good part of the campus, however, still retains its original character — scrub, palmyra trees and cashew plantations with open meadows.

I saw some forty species of birds during my stay here. A magpie-robin greeted me even as I stepped into the campus. I could hear 2-3 more at other sites. This bird was not common here earlier. Afforestation is perhaps encouraging more birds to colonise the campus. Another species that appears to have increased in number is the brainfever bird, which was calling all the time.

Common myna continues to be among the commonest birds in the campus. I could see at least two nests being constructed in the transparent glass cases of sodium vapour lamps which had broken on the sides, allowing the entry of birds. Students of the School of Ecology have even seen birds nesting in cases of lamps that were in use. It is clear that mynas are catching up with modernisation. At yet another lamp, I noticed a spotted owlet flying out on seeing me.

The sighting of a great horned owl in flight at dusk was reassuring. I have seen the bird's nest in the campus and was happy that the bird manages to survive here. Several grey partridges were seen and heard. They appeared quite tame and were often seen at close range, leisurely walking off the road into the bushes.

On two days — 27th and 28th April, I noticed 5-6 forest wagtails in overhead flight around sunset time. They had taken off from the campus and flew in a northerly direction. They were perhaps on passage.

I met some of the students of the School of Ecology and went out birdwatching with them one morning. I hope they will

continue to monitor the birdlife of the campus and come up with some interesting findings.

Birding in the Javvadi Hills (Eastern Ghats), Tamil Nadu

Between February 7th and 10th (1999), I visited the Amerdhi and Kavalur area of the Javvadi hills in the Vellore/Tiruvannamalai districts of Tamil Nadu. Since we were on a camp for the children of Rishi Valley School, I could devote only a little time for birding. Yet since the birdlife was rich I ended up with a checklist of over 70 species. At Amerdhi, 30 kms from Vellore, we camped on the bed of a stream, a kilometre from the forest bungalow. The habitat was well wooded with tall trees near the streams and dense deciduous forest and scrub elsewhere. At Kavalur, the vegetation appeared drier but was well wooded though with no perennial water source.

A pair of Indian rollers was noticed fighting for a dead palm stump against roseringed parakeets and common mynas. A pair of blackbacked woodpeckers was heard in the vicinity of the Forest Rest House at Amerdhi. It was here that I had first seen this species 13 years ago. A small blue kingfisher, a grey wagtail and a pond heron were seen near the stream. Among the other birds seen at Amerdhi were Tickell's blue flycatcher, pied bushchat, forest wagtail and shama (heard).

The drive to Kavalur through the hills and forest was very picturesque. Though there were several habitations and cultivated areas, yet good forest patches still survive. Kavalur is situated on a plateau and is 48 kms from Amerdhi and 27 kms from Vaniyampadi. It is known for its Observatory which has Asia's largest telescope. At the campus of the observatory, we noticed a red silk cotton tree in bloom and this attracted among other birds racket-tailed and haircrested drongos, little scalybellied woodpecker and common mynas. A sub-adult male paradise flycatcher was seen near the hostel; white-eyes moved about noisily on the trees.

An early morning walk along the road towards Jamnamaruthur was most rewarding and we saw the bulk of our birds on this short walk. Green sandpipers and pond herons were noticed at a pool. Calls of grey partridges were heard from fields and in the forest undergrowth grey junglefowl kept calling. We saw a barred jungle owlet and also heard their calls. Bulbuls were amongst the commonest birds and were

represented by three species — redvented, redwhiskered and whitebrowed. Jungle and whiteheaded were the most conspicuous among babblers. Three other species were also recorded — slatyheaded scimitar babbler, rufousbellied and spotted babblers — mainly by their calls.

Several shamas were heard from the dense undergrowth while magpie-robins were more conspicuous, calling from exposed branches of trees. Grey drongos were the commonest drongos. We noticed two bronzed drongos on a tree. A pitta called and a little away the rattling calls of the brown shrikes were heard.

I sadly missed seeing the blackheaded oriole I had seen on earlier visits to Amerdhi. There were a few golden orioles, though. We saw both the small minivet and the orange minivet perched as well as in flight. The latter, in flight, looked striking against a clear blue sky with the early morning sun adding to the colours. Ioras and goldmantled chloropsis were fairly common. There were a few large cuckoo-shrikes around and their distinct call-notes were also heard.

I did not come across raptors other than a honey buzzard (?) and a kestrel. The habitat was sure to support several species including the black eagle. A serious study of the avifauna of this region and other associated hills which are poorly studied needs to be undertaken before much of it gets destroyed by "development".

Comments on the March / April 1999 issue

I read with interest the article on the Birds at Sembium and the checklist that followed. I was surprised to find in their list two species — rufousbellied (sic) plaintive cuckoo (*Cacomantis merulinus*) and greybacked/Tibetan shrike (*Lanius tephronotus*). Was it through an oversight that these species got included in the checklist? Mr V. Gurusami who has spent a great deal of his life at the Sembium estate documenting birdlife is not likely to commit identification errors. Hence it is with great hesitation that I raise my doubts on the inclusion of these birds in the list. Perhaps the former could be the Indian plaintive cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) and the latter, rufousbacked shrike (*Lanius schach caniceps*) — the greybacked subspecies. However, I do have sightings of a mysterious shrike seen in the neighbourhood of Chennai about which an article has been written (and is presently with the Editor: reproduced in this issue[Editor]). Was it this shrike that has been identified as the Tibetan shrike?

I also have some comments on the forest wagtail sightings by Theodore Baskaran in the MCC Campus, Tambaram, who mentions that this species is quite rare in Chennai. I would like to point out that this bird is fairly common, seen in pairs or small parties, if one visits the right habitat at the right time of the year. I have seen it regularly in well-wooded shady groves with little undergrowth as in the Guindy Park, MCC Campus, Theosophical Society Estates and Manali grove. It arrives around mid-September and stays until early May. It is mainly a passage bird but several individuals can be seen throughout winter. Those familiar with

their calls cannot miss the bird in the late evenings or early mornings in September/October and April/May when there is considerable movement of this species in Chennai. On such occasions, I have seen the bird in overhead flight over my house in Santhome. Once, R Kannan had a bird in his garden in the busy T Nagar area in early May.

Greybacked shrike and its habitat in Madras

V Gurusami enquired (NLBW 37(5): 91, 1997) if the grey (rufous) backed shrike (*Lanius schach*) has ever been seen in Madras city and its surroundings.

The only place in Madras where I have seen this shrike is the Vandalur Reserve Forest where the Arignar Anna Zoological park is now located. The bird was never seen in large numbers and appeared to be restricted to the scrub jungle. Douglas Dewar (1905, *JBNHS*, XVI(3) : 484-498) had remarked that the rufousbacked shrike "is not common about Madras". Barnes (1939; *JBNHS*, 40: 467-476) in her list of birds observed in and near Tambaram (on the outskirts of Madras and close to Vandalur) had found the bird throughout the year in the scrub jungle and garden and was "very common". I have myself not seen the bird at the Madras Christian College Campus (where Barnes had done most of her observations) on my several visits. But Selvarathinam and others (1993) have seen the bird in the campus in the period 1990-93 but apparently the bird was "not common".

A recent list of birds compiled by the staff and researchers at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park (1995; *NLBW*, 35(2) : 33- 35) does not include this shrike. My own observations of the greybacked shrike at Vandalur dates back to 1989 when the Zoological park was in its initial phase and shifting and landscaping work was still in progress. It appears that habitat changes in the recent past has resulted in the decline and disappearance of certain birds.

In 1989, I surveyed seven scrub jungle patches in various stages of habitat degradation/alteration and compared their bird life. I found that although sites that were subjected to habitat alterations such as artificial tree planting had more number of bird species, it was the undisturbed scrub forests that had the specialised birds that were not often encountered in altered sites. I had remarked in my M.S. Thesis (1989): "The Vandalur Reserve Forest is most vulnerable ... and a number of specialist scrub birds are likely to be lost in the near future as a result of extensive alterations to the habitat imposed by the expanding Zoological Park". I had also listed out some 26 bird species that were likely to disappear mainly due to loss of habitat (i.e. scrub jungle) in and around Madras in the near future. The recent Vandalur list (cited above) appears to confirm my fears. This list does not contain 19 species seen by me in 1989 and this includes 8 listed out as threatened. Perhaps not all of these birds have yet disappeared from the site but it is likely that several of them have become scarce. However, the absence of some of the typical scrub birds from their list is quite disturbing especially as some of these are rather conspicuous birds and not likely to be easily missed such as the ring dove, jungle prinia, whitethroated munia and greybacked shrike.

A mysterious shrike ?

I first spotted this shrike on 2nd December 1986 in the meadow on the northern bank of Adyar Estuary, perched on a *Prosopis* bush. I used to see it at more or less at the same spot on most of my visits. I saw it on 30th March 1987, again on 27th November 1987 and it was on 31st December 1987 that I finally managed to get a good view of the bird and made a sketch and took detailed descriptions, which I give below :-

"Size : brown shrike \pm ; slightly dumpy. Above : forehead, crown and nape-grey. A black mask through the eye and thin white line above. Back : Rich rufous brown. Wings : blackish brown with white lining to primaries. A white mirror patch on wings seen at rest as well as in flight. Tail (above) : blackish with white retrices. Upper tail coverts and rump : grey?."

Below : Throat and chin — pure white. Rest of the underparts — off-white. Flanks — rusty rufous. Undertail — white with dark terminal patch.

Bill — Pale fleshy with dark tip. Legs — dark grey.

The behaviour was typical shrike-like. The bird was often seen perched on branches of *Prosopis*, *Calotropis* or *Zizyphus* shrubs, with the tail slowly flicking up and down. It foraged from the ground. Its flight was like other shrikes, dropping down and flying low over the ground. The bird was silent and appeared quite shy, never allowing a close approach".

After this, I located the bird on five other dates between October 1988 and February 1991 at the Adyar meadow. In 1992, I saw a similar bird at the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary (Trichur, Kerala) on 15th February. I did not come across the bird after this and I almost forgot about it until recently.

On 24th December 1997, I was watching birds in the company of Dr Thomas van Zandt of USA, some four kilometers ahead of Vedanthangal in an open area dotted with sparse scrub when our attention was drawn to a shrike sitting on a bush. We had a 25X spotting scope and so we got excellent views of the bird and the description tallied with that of the shrike I had failed to identify all these years. Next to this bird was a baybacked shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) and we were able to distinguish the two species very easily. The baybacked had a white head and a much broader black band on the forehead. It was also more dumpy than the other shrike which appeared slimmer.

What could this bird be? The nearest species I could get to is the redbacked shrike (*Lanius collurio collurio*). However the redbacked shrike has no white mirror patches, has a black bill and less white on the outer tail feathers. It was certainly not a baybacked shrike. Is it a hybrid or could it be a new species of shrike? Has anyone come across similar birds? I would welcome comments and suggestions.



Birds of Nagarhole (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park, Karnataka

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My first contribution by way of an article in the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (NLBW) was on the suggestion of Dr. Asad Rahmani, Director, BNHS. A couple of years and a series of notes and articles later, the urge to share my experiences with other like-minded nature enthusiasts has only grown. The NLBW is an ideal platform to discuss various aspects of ornithology with fellow naturalists, both amateur and professional, not only from India but across the world.

Here, I give an account of the birds seen during my visits to the Nagarhole (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park in 1999. My first visit was on 12th January, when I stayed at the Kabini River Lodge situated on the bank of the river Kabini (a tributary of the Cauvery) that separates the National Park from the adjoining Bandipur Tiger Reserve. The lodge is located near Karapur village about eight kilometers to the east of Sunkadakatte Forest Guest House. I moved extensively through the Sunkadakatte range and was enthralled by the birds. Though Nagarhole has been synonymous with elephants and other large mammals, the rich avifauna is a welcome supplement.

Within four months i.e., on 9th May 1999, I once again lay my foot on this wonderland, but this time at the park head quarters, situated in the Nalkere range. The purpose of the visit was to volunteer for the yearly ungulate census

conducted by Dr. Ullas Karanth, WCS, for estimating the tiger populations and determining the viability of the forest in general. I list the birds encountered during this 10 day stay.

Nagarhole N.P. (643 sq. km.), located between 11°45' & 12°15' N Lat. and 76°5' & 76°25' E Long. forms a part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and together with the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (875 sq. km.) and Mudumalai National Park (325 sq. km.) on the south-east and the Wynad Wildlife Sanctuary (350 sq. km.) on the south-west forms the largest protected forest tract in peninsular India.

The park receives an annual rainfall of approximately 1600 mm and has an average elevation of 800-850m above MSL. The highest point is Masalbetta whereas the lowest is the river Kabini (701m). The park has a moist mixed and dry deciduous forest type comprising *Tectona grandis*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Grewia tilaefolia*, *Butea monosperma*, *Lagerstroemia lanceolata*, *Cassia fistula*, *Bombax ceiba* and *Dendrocalamus strictus* amongst various other species.

Nagarhole, along with Bandipur and Mudumalai is one of the last remaining strongholds of the Asiatic elephant *Elephas maximus* and gaur *Bos gaurus*. It also supports a sizeable population of chital *Axis axis*, sambar *Cervus unicolor*, barking

A combined list of birds seen during the two visits (A = January 1999 B = May 1999)

1. Grey junglefowl <i>Gallus sonneratti</i>	[A,B]	46. Nilgiri wood pigeon <i>Columba elphinstonii</i>	[B]	90. Small minivet <i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	[A,B]
2. Common peafowl <i>Pavo cristatus</i>	[A,B]	47. White-breasted waterhen <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	[A,B]	91. Black drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	[A,B]
3. Red spurfowl <i>Galoperoxys spadicea</i>	[B]	48. Common coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	[A]	92. Ashy drongo <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	[A]
4. Lesser whistling teal <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	[A,B]	49. Common sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	[A]	93. White-bellied drongo <i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	[A]
5. Spotbill duck <i>Anas poecilorhynca</i>	[A]	50. Red-wattled lapwing <i>Vanellus indicus</i>	[A,B]	94. Bronzed drongo <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	[A,B]
6. Common flameback <i>Dinopium javanense</i>	[A,B]	51. River tern <i>Sterna aurantia</i>	[A]	95. Greater racket-tailed drongo <i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	[A,B]
7. Black-rumped flameback <i>Dinopium bengalense</i>	[A,B]	52. Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	[A,B]	96. Common iora <i>Agithina tiphia</i>	[A,B]
8. White-naped woodpecker <i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	[A,B]	53. Oriental honey-buzzard <i>Pernis ptilorhynchis</i>	[A,B]	97. Orange-headed thrush <i>Zoothera citrina cyanotus</i>	[B]
9. White-bellied woodpecker <i>Dryocopus javensis</i>	[B]	54. Black kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	[A,B]	98. Blue rock thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	[B]
10. Streak-throated woodpecker <i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>	[B]	55. Brahminy kite <i>Haliastur indus</i>	[A]	99. Asian brown flycatcher <i>Muscicpa dauurica</i>	[A,B]
11. Heart-spotted woodpecker <i>Hemicircus canente</i>	[B]	56. Grey-headed fish eagle <i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus</i>	[A]	100. Black-naped blue flycatcher <i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	[B]
12. White-cheeked barbet <i>Megalaima viridis</i>	[A,B]	57. Red-headed vulture <i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>	[A,B]	101. Tickell's blue flycatcher <i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	[B]
13. Coppermouth barbet <i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	[A,B]	58. Crested serpent eagle <i>Spilornis cheela</i>	[B]	102. Verditer flycatcher <i>Eumyias thalassina</i>	[B]
14. Malabar grey hornbill <i>Ocyroceros griseus</i>	[B]	59. Eurasian marsh harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	[A]	103. Oriental magpie robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	[A,B]
15. Eurasian hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	[A,B]	60. Shikra <i>Accipiter badius</i>	[A,B]	104. Indian robin <i>Saxicoloides fulcata</i>	[A,B]
16. Malabar trogon <i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>	[B]	61. Changeable hawk eagle <i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>	[B]	105. Pied bushchat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>	[A,B]
17. Indian roller <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	[A,B]	62. Little grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	[A]	106. Chestnut-bellied myna <i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	[A,B]
18. Common kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	[A]	63. Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	[B]	107. Brahminy myna <i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	[A]
19. White-throated kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	[A,B]	64. Little cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	[A,B]	108. Common myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	[A,B]
20. Stork-billed kingfisher <i>Halcyon capensis</i>	[B]	65. Great cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	[A]	109. Jungle myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	[A,B]
21. Pied kingfisher <i>Ceryle rudis</i>	[A]	66. Little egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	[A,B]	110. Hill myna <i>Gracula religiosa</i>	[A,B]
22. Green bee-eater <i>Merops orientalis</i>	[A]	67. Grey heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	[A]	111. Chestnut-bellied nuthatch <i>Sitta castanea</i>	[B]
23. Blue-tailed bee-eater <i>Nyctornis athertoni</i>	[A]	68. Purple heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	[A]	112. Great tit <i>Parus major</i>	[A,B]
24. Common hawk cuckoo <i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	[A,B]	69. Great egret <i>Casmerodius alba</i>	[A,B]	113. Barn swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	[A,B]
25. Indian cuckoo <i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	[B]	70. Intermediate egret <i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	[A,B]	114. Red-rumped swallow <i>Hirundo daurica</i>	[A,B]
26. Drongo cuckoo <i>Surniculus lugubris</i>	[B]	71. Cattle egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	[A,B]	115. Red-whiskered bulbul <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	[A,B]
27. Asian koel <i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	[A,B]	72. Indian pond heron <i>Ardeola grayii</i>	[A,B]	116. Red-vented bulbul <i>Phycnonotus cafer</i>	[A]
28. Bluefaced malkoha <i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>	[B]	73. White ibis <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	[A]	117. Great reed warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	[B]
29. Lesser coucal <i>Centropus bengalensis</i>	[B]	74. Asian openbill <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	[A,B]	118. Ashy prinia <i>Prinia socialis</i>	[A,B]
30. Greater coucal <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	[A,B]	75. Black stork <i>Ciconia nigra</i>	[A]	119. Asian plain prinia <i>Prinia inornata</i>	[A,B]
31. Roseringed parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	[A,B]	76. Woolly-necked stork <i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	[A]	120. Common tailorbird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	[A,B]
32. Plum-headed parakeet <i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	[A,B]	77. Lesser adjutant <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	[A]	121. Eurasian chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	[A]
33. Malabar parakeet <i>Psittacula columboides</i>	[A,B]	78. Goldfronted leafbird <i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>	[B]	122. Greenish warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	[A,B]
34. Asian palm swift <i>Cypsiurus balaisensis</i>	[B]	79. Bay-backed shrike <i>Lanius vittatus</i>	[A]	123. Indian scimitar babbler <i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>	[B]
35. Crested treeswift <i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>	[B]	80. Rufous-backed shrike <i>Lanius schach</i>	[A,B]	124. Yelloweyed babbler <i>Chrysomma sinensis</i>	[B]
36. Little swift <i>Apus affinis</i>	[A]	81. White-bellied treepie <i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>	[B]	125. Jungle babbler <i>Turdoides striatus</i>	[A,B]
37. Collared scops owl <i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	[A]	82. Rufous treepie <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	[B]	126. Pale-billed flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	[A,B]
38. Spot-bellied eagle owl <i>Bubo nepalensis</i>	[B]	83. House crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>	[A]	127. Purple sunbird <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	[A,B]
39. Jungle owlet <i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	[B]	84. Large-billed crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	[A,B]	128. Purple-rumped sunbird <i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	[B]
40. Indian nightjar <i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	[A]	85. Ashy wood swallow <i>Artamus fuscus</i>	[B]	129. White-browed wagtail <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	[A]
41. Rock pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	[A]	86. Black-hooded oriole <i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	[A]	130. Yellow wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>	[A]
42. Eurasian collared dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	[A,B]	87. Large cuckoo shrike <i>Coracina macei</i>	[B]		
43. Spotted dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	[A,B]	88. Black-headed cuckoo shrike <i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	[A, B]		
44. Green imperial pigeon <i>Ducula aenea</i>	[A,B]	89. Scarlet minivet <i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	[A,B]		
45. Yellow-footed green pigeon <i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	[B]				

deer *Muntiacus muntjak* and sloth bear *Melursus ursinus*. Predators like the tiger *Panthera tigris*, leopard *Panthera pardus*, leopard cat *Felis bengalensis*, jungle cat *Felis chaus* and dhole *Cuon alpinus* find a safe retreat in this well protected forest. In fact, it is the best place in the subcontinent for sighting that master hunter the leopard.

The appreciable bird diversity can be attributed to the innumerable rivulets and medium-sized waterholes that are scattered across the park, ensuring a year-round water supply. Its proximity to other well protected nature reserves is an added bonus. The current bird-list (Anon., 1987) of nearly 270 species includes the lesser adjutant, making it one of the few places that harbours this bird in southern India.

The most spectacular sighting during the first visit was of a black stork *Ciconia nigra* and lesser adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* on 14th Jan. 1999, near a small rivulet, a few kilometers from the Bisalvadi waterhole in the Sunkadakatte range. Both the birds were seen feeding at the periphery of a tiny pool of water by the side of the rivulet in a densely wooded patch. The lesser adjutant is regularly sighted in this region, whereas the sighting of the black stork was the first of its kind from Nagarhole. There have been a few records of this bird from Kerala as well as Maharashtra. But very scanty information on its distribution in Karnataka, makes this sighting a significant one (Andheria, 1999). The bird migrates to the Indian subcontinent during the winter months from Eastern Europe - its breeding ground. However, more needs

to be known about its spread in the Indian peninsula to comment on its status in its winter refuge.

Some of the other sightings worth mentioning include the spot-bellied¹ (forest) eagle owl, lesser coucal, white bellied treepie, grey headed fish eagle, red headed (king) vulture, Malabar trogon, chestnut-bellied nuthatch, white-bellied (great black) woodpecker and heart-spotted woodpecker. In fact, all the woodpeckers listed below are fairly common in the Nalkere range indicating an abundance of matured, old wood - a currency to measure the health of the forest.

Having highlighted the immense "Natural" wealth of the region, it would be rather unfair to ignore the efforts of the people responsible for such a prodigality. For...., I sincerely believe that the traditional haunt of animals has been so severely damaged by man that it can no longer revive itself. I agree with naturalists who disagree with the highly misappropriated saying - "leave nature alone and it will take care of itself". Under the current scenario, it is not less fictitious than believing that we will outlive the tons of nuclear waste - the result of our lust for power and technological advancement. It is high time we understand the worth of effective wildlife policing that will and should revolve around the welfare of wildlife and not humans who claim to be dependent on it. As Dr. K.U. Karanth, WCS, rightly puts it, "you

can't have both, an intact egg as well as an omelette", it will be better if we set our priorities right before it is too late. There is only three percent of potentially good wildlife habitat left in India and wildlife needs to get precedence over humans in at least this tiny patch of land.

This has been realized by the concerned authorities in Nagarhole as a result of which it enjoys excellent protection from poachers and loggers. External agencies and political will have further bolstered the tiger conservation project in the region. It is an example of how co-operation between the Forest Department and non-governmental organizations can positively protect wildlife, even in a country suffering from acute shortage of space and fodder. Wildlife First! A Bangalore based NGO along with other donor agencies like Wildlife Conservation Society (New York), GTP etc. have donated vehicles, wireless sets and other field-kits to the Forest Department. *If these efforts fail the crackle of the hill myna and the kutrook of the barbet will be lost forever...*

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Comments on the March/April 99, Newsletter

LAVKUMAR KHACHER, 646, Vastunirman, Gandhinagar, Gujarat 382 002

Be what may, we need to have Subramaniam's (Subu's) Directory of nesting colonies widely publicised and a subcontinent-wise approach formulated.

Regarding the Table showing painted stork census results for 1990-96 some pertinent comments need to be made. Surely these statistics are highly misleading. How many enumerators have been operating over this vast area and what are their conclusions? Would it not be better to enumerate birds in colonies? For instance, Andhra Pradesh's increase from 89 birds in 1990 to 2560 in 1996 and Delhi's drop from 372 birds in 1991 to 1 bird in 1995 should raise eyebrows. Rajasthan's fluctuations are amazing. Also, Diu and Pondicherry cannot be treated on par with their neighbours, and if we go by statistics alone, painted stork numbers are on the rise - almost double in India and South Asia or were there more enumerators in 1996 than there were in 1990? No, the emphasis should be on a very serious effort to enumerate colonies and census the breeding pairs. Perhaps this should be followed up by banding the juveniles. Then statistics would be more reliable.

Page 24 List of Birds seen in Dachigam National Park

The article preceding the list is delightful. The list has missed out the paradise flycatcher and a leaf warbler. I am

wondering whether the slaty blue flycatcher should not be the verditer blue flycatcher. The white breasted dipper they saw is missing from the list! Khursheed Ahmad and friends are well placed to make a comparative study of the white breasted and the brown dippers since they both occur in the area.

Page 25 Partridges

Himmatsinhji has noted that the hen lays "one egg every day generally in the late afternoon between 3 and 4 p.m." and that "she starts to incubate after the last egg of the clutch is laid." Poultry hens interestingly lay in the morning around 8.00 a.m. start incubating the morning after the last egg of the clutch is laid. This I have seen with Indian robins, Marshal's ioras, small minivets, whitebellied minivets, yelloweyed babblers, tailorbirds, ashy wren warblers, redvented bulbuls and purple sunbirds.

To conclude, I am surprised that the Editor should be pleased at Grimmet *et al.*, making "several references to the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*" (page 19) and so makes "him feel that it has arrived". The NL had arrived the day it was incubated, almost four decades ago.

¹ In the index of English names page 876 in the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent by Grimmet *et al.*, the old name forest eagle owl is used. But in plate 29 page 94, the new name spot-bellied eagle owl is used. Just shows how difficult it is to be consistent in "Name dropping" Editor.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIGHTING OF GREEN MUNIA (*ESTRILDA FORMOSA*) AT MT. ABU. CHANDRESH LODHIYA, ANALA 27-28, Sanskar-II, nr. Ketav petrol Pump, Polytechnic Road, Ahmedabad 380 015

This is to confirm sightings of green munia (*Estrilda formosa*) four times, near Oriya village, 8 kms from Mount Abu towards Gurushikhar in Rajasthan. I saw the birds during our field sessions, of an environment education camp conducted by ANALA. The details are as below :

Description : Light olive green above, yellow below the flanks prominently barred with greenish brown and white. (the blackish portion of the tail was not visible as the bird was sitting on Lantana shrub).

Behaviour : The single bird was chirping. There was a similar sound from the bush nearby, though I could locate only one bird.

Location : Very close to the border of Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, roughly 8 kms above the main town and 10 kms below Gurushikhar, the highest point of Aravali range.

Date : 5th November, 1997 **Time :** Around 5.30 p.m.

Nearest town : Mount Abu. **Nearest Village :** Oriya

About Mount Abu : It is a detached hill of Aravali range situated between 24°31' and 24°43' N latitude and 72°38' and 72°53' E longitude, 1219 m. above sea level.

Habitat : Very similar to the dry deciduous forest of Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, the bird was spotted sitting on lantana. The vegetation is dominated by lantana scrub.

A pair of green munias was again sighted three times behind Mini Nakki Lake, 2 kms from Delwara temple on the following occasions :

1. Date : 23rd October, 1998 Time : Around 12.00 noon
2. Date : 26th October, 1998 Time : Around 12.15 noon
3. Date : 26th October, 1998 Time : Around 3.30 p.m.

**ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE PALECAPPED PIGEON (*COLUMBA PUNICEA*) IN KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK. MAAN BARUA, Barua Bhavan, 107 MC Road, Uzan Bazar, Guwahati 781 001, Assam**

On 22nd April 1999, Noel Lock, Rajan Dowerah and myself spent an afternoon in the Eastern (Agaratoli) Range of Kaziranga National Park (26°35' - 26°45'N and 93°05' - 93°40'g). At about 1620 hrs, while driving through a stretch of mixed moist deciduous forest near Ahotguri, we came across two pigeon-like birds. One bird settled in a densely covered Uriam *Bischofia javanica* tree, while the other flew into the distant canopy. Presuming that they were green imperial pigeons *Ducula aenea* we decided to take a closer look. Much to our advantage the birds flew out and perched on an exposed branch at a distance of about 60m.

On observation through a pair of 10 x binoculars and a 30x telescope, I immediately recognised the bird as a palecapped pigeon *Columba punicea* When we returned, Ali and Ripley (1981) was looked up and it was interesting to note what they mention about the bird's behaviour :

"Feeds up in fruiting trees ... sits quietly, concealed among the foliage, flying out on an observer's close approach and resettling in another tree a short distance away." These behavioural remarks are a great aid to identification.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Noel Lock and Rajan Dowerah for their company. Special thanks go to the Forest Department and staff of Wild Grass for their co-operation at all times. Anthony Baker, Mridu Paban Phukan and Pratap Singh have all helped in their own way.

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[The name of this bird in the Pictorial Guide & other books is the purple wood pigeon. The pale cap is so prominent that the change of name is perhaps justified to make identification easier. But in principle, old common names, if retained, would make matters easier for birdwatchers. There is a powerful plea for retaining old names in the Editorial of the Hindu of 29 June 1999 I reproduce a few paras.] Editor

"Politicians and sometimes intellectuals turn a blind eye to certain invaluable aspects in an issue as sensitive as the naming game. As much as an individual will squirm at the idea of rechristening him or her, a city or locality, more specifically the people who live there or use it, will undoubtedly "feel" uneasy at its being renamed. One wonders how many are comfortable with calling Calcutta's Howrah Bridge Rabindra Sethu or Chennai's Nungambakkam High Road Uththamar Gandhi Salai. Perhaps, it is as illogical as trying to rename Calcutta's Victoria Memorial or Agra's Taj Mahal. Will it make sense to give a new title to Hyderabad's Golconda Fort or Srinagar's Dal Lake? Tampering with a name is as terrible as playing with fact and history, and apart from the enormous inconvenience and confusion it causes in today's world of communication, such adventurism only reaffirms one's insecurity with the historical perspective."

**A RECENT SIGHTING OF THE HILL BLUE FLYCATCHER [*CYORNIS BANYUMAS* (BLYTH)] FROM NAMERI NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM. MAAN BARUA and PANKAJ SHARMA, 107, M.C. Road, Uzan Bazar, Guwahati 781 001, Assam**

The Hill or largebilled blue flycatcher *Cyornis banyumas* is a rare resident within the Indian Sub-continent and is found in the Himalayas from West-Central Nepal east through Arunachal Pradesh and north-eastern India.¹ The only recent published record of this species from the north-east is from Pange in Arunachal Pradesh.²

It has probably been overlooked due to the difficulty in separating it from other 'blue' flycatchers in general and Tickell's blue flycatcher *Cyornis Tickelliae* in particular.

Observation in Nameri National Park

On 16 January 1998, we were watching birds in a patch of semi-evergreen forest en route to Kuruwa Beel in Nameri National Park. It was a cloudy day and bird activity continued till late morning. At about 730 hrs, we came across a 'mixed-species flock' that mainly consisted of rufous-gorgeted flycatcher *Ficedula strophilata*, scarlet minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*, striped tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*, maroon oriole *Oriolus trailii*. While observing the flock, we noticed a 'blue' flycatcher that was moving through the undergrowth. Despite its skulking and restless behaviour, the bird offered good views by perching on an exposed branch c25 ft away.

Both of us got good views of the bird and its apparent features were noted as below :

Size sparrow +-; cobalt-blue crown, nape, wings, rump, back and tail; shiny blue on forehead, lores and extending in a thin line towards ear coverts forming a sort of supercilium reminiscent of that of *Muscicapa hyperythra* (although not as broad and extensive); rufous on chin, throat, breast and rest of underparts grading into flanks, upper belly and merging into the white of lower belly and vent. Blackish ear coverts and dark bill.

Identification

When we compared our notes on returning home, we concluded that in all probability the bird was *C. banyumas*.

We ruled out the possibilities of the bird being pigmy blue flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni*, sapphire flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*, or bluethroated flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*. The only possibilities that were left were Tickell's blue *C. tickelliae* and hill blue flycatchers *C. banyumas*. After careful study of literature we decided that it was the latter one.

The identification of both species was not clearly given in earlier field guides and presumably distribution was used as a factor in determining which species a bird belonged to. Ali and Ripley³ mention that "The nearly identical *tickelliae* is not likely to occur in the range of *banyumas*". However, its occurrence in Cachar reported by Baker (*vide* Ali and Ripley)³ and more recently in Arunachal Pradesh² shows that both species do overlap in their ranges. The illustrations in the 'Pictorial Guide' (Ali, S and Ripley, SD 1983 New Delhi : Oxford University Press) are not very helpful as differences are not portrayed very clearly. At that time we consulted King *et. al.*⁴ who do mention :

"Hill blue flycatcher *C. banyumas* Male : difficult to separate from tickell's blue but orange-rufous of throat, breast and flanks grades into white of centre of belly and under-tail coverts. Wing lining buffy rufous mixed with white. Shining blue on upperparts limited to forehead, eyebrow and shoulder..."

Some of these features which tally with our observation led us to believe that the bird was *C. banyumas* and not *C. tickelliae*. With the recent publication of Grimmett *et. al.*¹ (which was not available during the time of sighting)

identification of both species has been treated more extensively :

"Hill blue flycatcher *Cyornis banyumas* 14cm. Male distinguished from male tickell's blue by deeper cobalt-blue upperparts, blackish ear-coverts, orange chin (dark blue ear-coverts meets under bill on most of tickell's), and ill-defined border between orange of breast and white of belly, with orange extending to upper belly and flanks (although there is some variation in sharpness of border on both species). Further, has longer primary projection compared with tickell's".

"Tickell's blue flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* 14cm. Male has blue upperparts, and orange breast which is clearly demarcated from white belly and flanks. Told from bluethroated flycatcher by paler cerulean-blue upperparts, orange throat, and often clear division between orange of breast and white of belly/flanks (although orange can diffuse onto belly and flanks on some). For differences from hill blue flycatcher see that species."

Discussion

Although sharpness of border on both species is variable¹ the combination of other characteristics such as cobalt-blue upperparts (cerulean-blue in case of Tickell's), orange chin (dark blue ear coverts meet under bill on most of Tickell's) and shining blue limited to forehead and eyebrow indicate that in all probability the bird was *C. banyumas*. Moreover the bird also had black ear-coverts (*contra* dark blue in Tickell's).

The altitudinal distribution of *C. banyumas* is poorly known. A specimen has been collected in Nepal in August at 2600m and in Assam they are known to breed between 750 and 1800m, mostly above 1200m. In Margherita (eastern Assam) they are found as low as 300m in summer. Ali and Ripley³ further mention that the "Himalayan population seems to winter in Burma (Southern Shan States) while Assam birds spread over the adjacent plains in winter".

The occurrence of *C. banyumas* in Nameri suggests that some birds (of the Himalayan population?) probably winter along the foothills of the Himalayas. Although known to winter in the 'adjacent plains' along the hills south of the Brahmaputra³, there have been no recent records of this species from anywhere in Assam. Furthermore, there are no records of it wintering along the Himalayan foothills. Though chances of the bird being overlooked is high, only one sighting during the last four years of birdwatching in the park (including two years of residence in the area - PS) is an indication of its rarity.

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SIGHTING OF ORTOLAN BUNTING IN SOUTH-WEST RAJASTHAN. MAYUR MISTRY (MAYUR — ULUPI), 45/269 Vijayanagar, Naranpura, Ahmedabad 380 013

On 11th March '99 at 4.00 p.m. I reached Karawada, in south-west Rajasthan, Tehsil (taluka) Kherwada, Dist. Udaipur.

Kherwada is an undulating and hilly area of Aravalli, and surrounded by grassland, shrubs and cultivation. Small farms of wheat and gram and small bald hillocks are covered by very few trees, flame of the forest, khejadi, teak, banyan, pipal, neem, and various thorny species of babool (*Acacia*) and cactus. On the outskirts of Karawada there is a lake called "Fatehsinh Talab" of about 1.5 sq km area. I and Yhahaykhan Baloch went to the lake for birdwatching. I had a binocular (7 x 35) and Pictorial guide to the Birds of Indian Subcontinent. I saw sarus cranes, garganey, cotton teal, lesser whistling teal, coot, purple moorhen, small and large egret, pheasant tailed and bronzed winged jacana, dab-chick, small cormorant, river and black bellied tern, pond heron and a few more birds. Lotus and other floating, submerged aquatic vegetation covered the lake. The lake is given on lease for fishing by the Gram Panchayat. The barrage made from clay and earth, is pitched by stones, and it looks like a natural hillock. It was constructed about 100 years ago by a Rajput King of Pahada state. Small shrubs and thorny plants are grown on the barrage, mainly prosopis (*P.juliflora*) called "Gando bawal".

While walking on the barrage, I saw a sparrow-like bird just 10 feet away. It flew and settled on a branch of *P.juliflora*, probably fifteen feet away. I could see only the back. It was a bunting.

I took out my notebook and pen and started drawing. I noted its physical appearance. I saw its front side; it had three light yellowish patches on the upper part of its body. Grey head, pink beak, two light yellowish 'moustache' like patch and a third on the throat, spread from beak to chest. Its chest was pink with 'Fluffy' patch. Later I saw it sitting on the ground. I was confused by the picture given in 'Pictorial Guide'. In the Pictorial there is a bird has a broad grey line between its yellow patch on the throat and pinkish chest. But this bunting had a very fine and thin grey line between the yellowish throat patch and the pink chest. Was it an ortolan bunting (*E. hortulana*)?



LITTLE TERN (*STERNA ALBIFRONS*) FOUND BREEDING IN RAJASTHAN. HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302 021 and MANOJ KULSHRESHTHA, B-33, Sethi Colony, Jaipur

On 02.06.98 we visited Revasa lake, Sikar district, and found a breeding colony of blackwinged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* on the northern shore of the lake. Two nests of little tern *Sterna albifrons* were also discovered by us in the same area.

This note describes the confirmed breeding of the little tern from Rajasthan. According to Ali and Ripley (1981) it breeds 'only in W. Pakistan (Makran, Las Bela) and N.W. India (Gujarat — Bhavnagar)'. They also mention about breeding records from the Chenab and Sutlej rivers in the Punjab

(apparently these records are based upon Whistler's information and are not recent). Roberts (1991) also gives only old breeding records from Pakistan. Ganguli (1975) recorded breeding of the species in the 1960s but Vyas (1996) has questioned its recent breeding by the Jumna near Delhi.

The nesting occurs on sandbanks in rivers or sandy islets in jheels (Ali and Ripley 1981). Nests on sandbanks or shingle of rivers, or islets in jheels, or on bare rock or shingle on islets off coast (Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp 1998). We found the nests on a peninsula at Revasa although the documented nesting records are only from habitats as already described in this paragraph.

On both the nests we found the birds incubating and observed them from 150 metres with the aid of a telescope. On our approach both the incubating birds flew away and we quickly examined the nests. The nest was about 7 metres from the lake shore and had three eggs. Its diameter was 7.4 cms and depth 3.2 cms compared to the average diameter of 15 cms (Ali and Ripley 1981) and 10.5 cms and depth 2.5 cms (Cramp 1985). The nest scrape was made in bare sand which was quite wet. It was lined with a few rootlets and there were some pebbles. The pointed ends of the two eggs were embedded in the sand about 1/5th. The second nest was about 8 metres from the lake shore. It was 8 cms in diameter and 2.7 cms in depth. The nest was in bare sand had two eggs and two tiny pebbles. The pointed ends were facing the same side. The eggs in both the nests were sand coloured with speckles, spots, and some blotches of various shades of brown or reddish brown. The eggs of the first nest were less blotched on the pointed end compared to the larger end.

After a gap of 19 days while on a return visit on 21.06.98 only one pair was observed incubating in turn facing the strong wind. There were no signs of any activity at the first nest which had three eggs. Possibly after hatching the young had left the nest. The young leave the nest when only a few days old and hide in shingle or vegetation (Cramp 1985). It is also likely that the nest had been disturbed by predators.

We found one chick and two eggs in the nest. Obviously, one more egg had been laid after our first visit on 02.06.98. The chick was a ball of pale cream short down, finely speckled black. Its bill was greyish-flesh, tip dusky — brown or black and feet pink-flesh.

On approaching the nest the bird flew away. The pair hovered about 12 metres above us all the time. Alarm calls were given while hovering but did not attack. On moving away the pair resumed the incubation facing again into the strong wind. From 09.00 hours to 12.00 hours the incubating birds were observed from a distance of about 100 metres with the aid of a telescope. Frequent nest relief were noted usually after 15-20 minutes. No unusual ritual was observed during nest-relief. Mostly the bird coming for incubation would settle about 2 metres from the nest and then walk towards it.

Finally, on 30.06.98 at the site we found the nest bare but the anti-predator response of the terns was more aggressive than during the last two visits. The behaviour and alarm calls were quite different from the passive behaviour noticed during the first visit on 02.06.98. On searching the area we found one chick squatting in a cattle hoof-print some distance from the

abandoned nest. It was very well concealed and almost impossible to see. On retiring some distance away the parents resumed feeding the chick. It was responding to the parental calls and running towards them.

While we were observing the chick seven house crows arrived of the scene. The chick's anti-predator response on approach of danger was to crouch and freeze. The parents attacked the flying predators. Giving alarm calls they began a continuous barrage of swoops, though rarely striking. One bird briefly hovered on a house crow which had settled on the ground but did not strike. Partly repelled by the attack all crows landed on the ground close to the vegetation but the parents continued to mob the predators. This action lasted about 25 minutes (18.40 hours to 19.05 hours). The terns dived on the crows in turn. Their attacks ceased when the predators flew away.

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KINGFISHER HUNTING IN A WELL. ARUNACHALAM KUMAR, Professor of Anatomy, KMC Mangalore

The disappearance of the roosting call of the Indian pitta, uttered with unerring timing regularly heralds the onset of the Southwest monsoon on the Kanara coast. Time to double wrap the binoculars, and protect the sensitive lenses against ravages of humidity and mould. The incessant drumming of the cascading raindrops over the tile roofed housetops and the gurgling torrents of water as they jet through the stormwater drains, are sights and sounds to behold and savour. An occasional hungry bird does break the monotony of the grey and gloom, but in the main, June to August are birdless months. It was therefore with much surprise that I spotted a small blue kingfisher, active and alert, during the early days of this year's monsoon ... more so, as the little bird, was upto something quite unusual. From its perch on a well wall, the kingfisher made about four dives into the depths of the well, coming out once with a small trophy, a wriggling fresh water guppy. To my knowledge, I have never heard of a kingfisher

use a residential compound well (about 8 feet in diameter) as a larder. The water level in the fairly perennially fecund well was about 12 feet from the ground level. Though I have recorded the same species, *Alcedo atthis*, angle for fish in my fish pond, along with another, the pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), I thought this rare mode of feeding from a well, was worth reporting to the readers of the Newsletter.



RE-DISCOVERY OF BENGAL FLORICAN (*EUPODOTIS BENGALENSIS*) IN LAOKHOWA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY. SHIMANTA KUMAR GOSWAMI, CHANDRA MEDHI and BHRIGU BHUSAN GOSWAMI, Green Guard nature Organisation, Lakhinagar, P.O. Haibargaon, Dist. Nagaon, Assam

Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in the flood plains of the river Brahmaputra within the civil district of Nagaon and is about 30 Kms from Nagaon town. Geographically it is located between 26.30°N and 92.40°E. The Sanctuary covers a land area of about 70.1379 Sq.km. It was declared as a wild life sanctuary in the year 1989.

The Sanctuary is a habitat for various species of birds and the Bengal florican is one of them. Records show that there were several pairs of Bengal florican that bred inside the Sanctuary till 1980. Gradually, due to human disturbance it was badly affected and consequently they abandoned the Sanctuary. Since then not a single bird of this species was sighted there for several years. Even in the report of BNHS on "Status and Ecology of lesser and Bengal florican" the authors found no record of sighting this bird during the survey from 1985 to 1989 in Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

Contrary to this we are glad to announce that we have sighted Bengal floricans several times during our expeditions in the Sanctuary since 1994. Then in the latter part of the year 1998 the forest staff of Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary sighted a pair of Bengal florican getting ready for mating. In fact on 03-09-98 some forest personnel rescued an injured juvenile Bengal florican (male) in the Sanctuary. Incidentally, the authors happened to be there at that time and took some



photographs of the bird. (Presently the bird is being reared at Laokhowa Range Office).

These findings confirm the presence of Bengal florican in Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary despite the deteriorated conditions of their habitats; mainly in the high grass lands. This has also established the fact that the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary is a potential site for the conservation of Bengal florican.

The authors therefore feel that the appropriate authority should chalk out an effective plan and work in unison with Nature Care Organisations and bird lovers to save this endangered species of bird.



VULTURES DISAPPEARING FROM TUMKUR DISTRICT. AMEEN AHMED, Ghouse Buildings, Horpet Main Road, Tumkur 572 101

About 15 minutes drive from Tumkur town, Devarayana Durga (D.D) hills (13°23'N, 77°13'E) near Devarayana Durga state forest, a 44 sq. kms patch of thick deciduous forest, is a paradise for birdwatchers. And watching vultures here used to be much more than a pleasure. A small ridge leads to the face of Yoga Narasimha (YN) temple at the peak of D.D hill (approximately 4,000 feet above mean sea level). On the eastern face of the hill below the YN Temple are inaccessible cliffs, which hosted a nesting colony of longbilled vultures. Sitting at the northern end of the ridge, one can have a beautiful view of the fertile plains below, which are fed by the streams flowing out of D.D state forest. Also in view are the beautiful but broken chain of the hills lying between the eastern and the western ghats - Nandi hills, Savan Durga hill, hills of Tondebhavi to name a few. Much of my early birding days was spent at this place. Among the birdlife worth mentioning are yellow-throated bulbuls, with their pleasant calls, numerous raptors and the nesting colony of longbilled vultures. The sight of these scavengers gracefully descending down to their nests, like slim aircraft, is a memorable one.

Long billed vultures are one of the four species of vultures found in D D state forest. The other three being king vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*), white scavenger vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and white backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*). I had the opportunity to monitor the nesting site, mentioned above, since 1991. The number of nests remained constant at 8. The vultures nested here for the last time in 1996. Although I am not able to pinpoint the exact cause for this abandonment, I believe excessive tourism might be one of the reasons. The YN Temple is very popular and each weekend hundreds of people visit the place.

Dr. Asad R. Rahmani has done the right thing by declaring a crisis for these magnificent scavengers (Decline of vultures in India, Vol.38, No.5). I believe his latest study will reveal their real status and also provide some idea as to how they can be prevented from being wiped out in more areas, like the one in Devarayana Durga.



ON CONVEYING BIRD SOUNDS AND ECO-FRIENDLY PLASTIC BAGS. KUMARAN SATHASIVAM, 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625 001

Shankar Raman says, the song of the broad-tailed grass warbler is "*psit-psit-psit-psit-psit churr churr pseeu*" (Vol.38 : 1&2). I had once described it rather more tersely as consisting of "a musical first part and a second part consisting of a somewhat harsh note repeated several times".

Just as there may be a lack of clarity involved in describing birds' colours, so it is with putting down in words their songs and calls. There are some birds, of course, whose calls match the descriptions given in the books exactly. Few of us, I think, would attempt to improve upon the rendering of the redwattled lapwing's calls as "*Did he do it?*" and "*Pity to do it*". Similarly, I found one call of the rubythroated bulbul sounding uncannily like "*It's three thirty-two*". However, these cases are exceptional. Often a call is described correctly, and yet it conveys little of the effect to the reader. An example chosen at random from Salim Ali's *Birds of Kerala* is about the sounds made by the common myna: "... a varied assortment of sharp calls and chatter, some of the notes being quite pleasant".

The problem of conveying bird sounds through print is intractable. Visually, bird sounds may be represented through spectrographs. A spectrograph is a graph in which frequency is plotted versus time. The more intense frequency components are shown as darker points on the graph. A spectrograph may identify a bird, but looking at it, you will still not know how the bird vocalises. Therefore, this is not a solution to the problem.

Mr A. Perumal once showed me a Japanese bird book with a small gramophone record of bird songs in a pocket at the back. This is quaint, but circumvents solving the problem. The answer needs to be in *printed* form.

Further, to be meaningful to our ears, the representation of sound cannot be a *picture* like a spectrograph, but must be in the form of *words*. Perhaps a new language needs to be developed. It would have an alphabet made up of the fundamental bits of sounds made by birds. Who will pick up the gauntlet?

Is it not fortunate that we rely mainly on our eyes and ears to perceive birds? The mind boggles at the thought of having to describe bird smells and tastes with precision.



Playful Kites in Madurai — 2nd June 1999, around 4.30 p.m.

The sky was overcast in the afternoon after a hot day. On hearing thunder, I looked up, and saw a group of about a dozen pariah kites circling high above. Against the background of black rain clouds a large white object was clearly visible, attached to one of the kites. Another similar object was flying close to the group of birds. These white articles appeared to be kites (of the variety flown on strings, that is) and I thought that the bird had somehow got entangled with one. I got my binoculars out quickly to confirm this.

Through the glasses, however, the white things turned out to be thin films of plastic, probably the ubiquitous "carry-bags". As I watched, the pariah kite dropped its plastic sheet — it

had been carrying it with its feet — and as the film flew away in the wind, another kite swooped down and grabbed it. This kite in turn dropped the bag and another bird came down and caught hold of it. The bag was dropped a third time, and again it was caught. At least three birds were involved in this catch-and-drop activity. I suspect more of them were doing this, as two bags were aloft. I had to leave at this point, and I do not know how much longer the carry-bag activity continued.

I believe the kites were playing with the carrybags. Of course there might have been some food in them, or the birds might have mistaken them for something edible. That, however, seems unlikely. As playthings for pariah kites, we now have something to say for the much maligned plastic bags!



MISREPORTING OF MALLARDS. SUJAN CHATTERJEE, DB-75, Salt Lake City, Calcutta 700 064, West Bengal

Mallards in South West Bengal, Vol.39, No. 2 — Mr Kaushik Deuti has done it again! In NLBW, Vol.37, No.5 (back cover) he identified large cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) as Japanese cormorants (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) from the back covers of NLBW Vol.37, No.4 and claimed it to be the first record from India. As a result he was criticised by Krys Kazmierczak as mentioned by Aasheesh Pittie in NLBW Vol.38, No.1&2. Now he is the claimant of the first record of the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) from southern West Bengal. In an article in the "Journal of Landscape System & Ecological Studies" Vol.1, No.1 (1990), Dr A.K. Ghosh (Ex-Director of Zoological Survey of India) mentions about the collections made by of Zoological Survey of India of mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) between 1964-69. The collection was made from the now reclaimed marshlands near Calcutta known as the East Calcutta Wetlands now Salt Lake City. In a book "Mid-Winter Waterfowl Census in Southern West Bengal 1990-1997" — published in 1999 (where Mr K. Deuti has assisted in research), by a birdwatching organisation — Prakriti Samsad, it is mentioned that 17 mallards were recorded from Dabur Chaar (near Sunderbans) in 20th Jan 1991. Lt. Col. S.R. Banerjee (Now State Director of WWF-India Eastern Region) and Mr D. Ghosh also saw 2 mallards at Durgapur Barrage (southern West Bengal) in January 1995. It seems that mallards have always been present in southern West Bengal in small numbers.

He should be more careful about his articles in future because these can lead to a lot of confusion among serious birdwatchers and other researchers and could be very detrimental to a reputed organisation like the Zoological Survey of India.



USEFUL STATISTICS. ARUNAYAN SHARMA, N.S. Road, Malda 732 101, West Bengal

Recently I received a copy of "Compendium of Environment Statistics — 1998" from Central Statistical Organisation, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Programme Implementation, New Delhi.

I found a few important facts which may be useful for birdwatchers. In the fauna section the total number of Indian bird species mentioned is 1228. The total number of bird

species of the world is 9026 we have 13.61 % of the total 13.61% (page-43). In another section (page-46), it is reported that the total number of endemic bird species is 69, and threatened bird species is 55.

How many bird watchers know that India is estimated as the tenth among the plant rich countries. Out of the total twelve biodiversity hot spots in the world, India has two, one is the north-east region, and the other is the Western Ghats.



VAGRANTS OF DAKSHINA KANNADA AND UDUPI DISTRICTS OF KARNATAKA. N.A. ARAVINDA MADHYASTHA, "Inchara" Chitpadi, Udupi 576 101, Karnataka, India

Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, formerly a single district was separated into two. These districts comprise 5 and 3 talukas respectively. Both the districts together have a total coast line of about 141 kms. and provide a good opportunity for bird watchers who are particularly interested in the shore and sea birds.

These dual districts are very rich in bird diversity and about 275 species of birds have been recorded. This list includes migratory and vagrant birds. Of the 275 species recorded about 40 species are migratory shore birds and seabirds and about 13 species, are vagrants.

The vagrants offer opportunities to see some uncommon birds, brought to the shore by the monsoon winds, and due to crash landing as a result of exhaustion during their long migration.

The first record of a vagrant for the district was in August 1964, when a South polar skua was spotted and it was identified by Sri P. Gopalakrishna Nayak of Katpadi. This bird was ringed by United States Antarctic Research (Bird Banding) Program, on 5-3-1961.

A similar ringed bird was recorded at Malpe (13.2°N) in January, 1982. The bird was ringed in Russia, crash landed on a fishing boat in Malpe and was identified as a common tern.

Since then a number of vagrants have been described for the district and most of them were monsoon waifs. The local newspapers played a key role in giving wide publicity for these visitors of the coast. But for their co-operation some of the vagrants would not have been recorded.



COMMUNAL COURTSHIP (?) IN THE YELLOW WATTLED LAPWING. VIKRAM GADAGKAR, SHYAMAL. L., N.V. ARAKERI, MUKUND RAMAKRISHNAN, ANKUR KUMAR and UDAY RAGHAVAN, G.A. C/o. D- 240, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore 560 012

The Indian Institute of Science has an air strip located at the end of the Institute's premises. The air strip is a clearing surrounded on all sides by dry grass and shrubs which give it the impression of an arid grassland habitat. Yellow wattled lapwings (*Vanellus malabaricus*) are not an uncommon sight on entering the air strip. Yellow-wattled lapwing nests and chicks have been observed repeatedly in the month of May.

One nest of the red wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) has also been recorded during May 1995.

On 10th March, 1994 we witnessed a spectacular performance by the yellow wattled lapwings in the air strip which seemed to be a form of communal courtship. We were scanning the ground when our attention was drawn by four yellow wattled lapwings which flew over to a small clearing about ten metres away from us. It was 7.15 a.m. Our interest began to deepen rapidly when the four birds quickly aligned themselves in a single row, next to each other. They then lowered their heads and began to run simultaneously in one direction for a few metres, while calling loudly. They then stopped, made an about turn, and returned to their original positions in an identical fashion. At this stage, another set of four lapwings joined the group and all the eight birds together performed the 'ritual' described above for about 2-3 minutes. The lapwings then dispersed in pairs and mated. Whether there was any relationship between the relative positions of the birds in the earlier configuration and the membership of the mating pairs, could not be determined.

This singular and interesting episode will forever be in our memories. Could it be communal courtship? Has such behaviour been recorded previously in the yellow wattled lapwing? Any comments or information regarding other such observations in the yellow wattled lapwings or other species will be greatly appreciated. [I recall groups of tailor birds (about 20) twittering most energetically, suggesting communal courtship.] Editor.



LITTLE GREBE OR DABCHICK - A NEW SIGHTING IN THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE CAMPUS, BANGALORE. VIKRAM GADAGKAR, SHYAMAL. L., NAVANIT VIJAY ARAKERE, MUKUND RAMAKRISHNAN AND ABHISHEK LAHIRI, C/o D-240, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore 560 012

The Jubilee Gardens, located in the Indian Institute of Science Campus, is a patch of land dominated by an *Acacia* plantation. However, many other species of bushes and trees are also found there. In close proximity to the entrance of the Jubilee Gardens, there is a small rocky depression, popularly called Jubilee Pond, which is usually dry in summer but gets partially filled with water during the monsoon.

On 20th August 1995, we were surprised to find a nest with two eggs right in the middle of this pond. A careful examination revealed that the nest belonged to the little grebe or dabchick (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), the identity of which was confirmed when the adult itself surfaced. Subsequently, we observed a single chick following the adult on 24th September and three chicks during the next week. The dabchick was a new sighting in the Indian Institute of Science as it had never been recorded previously although it is quite common in neighbouring lakes and tanks. The unexpected nesting of the dabchick on the campus provided opportunities for us to make observations of its nesting behaviour.

With the addition of the little grebe, the total number of bird species recorded on the Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore, now stands at 160.

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ARE VULTURE'S A DYING SPECIES? Ms. SANTOSH BHALLA, C/o. The Straw Board Mfg. Co. Ltd. Ambala Road, Saharanpur 247 001.

I have a query - are the scavenger vultures a dying species? Scores of vultures used to come for a night halt to a huge silk-cotton tree next to our house. But for the last 10/11 months, we have not seen any passing this way. Could you enlighten me please. I only hope this useful bird is not on the verge of extinction.



A NEW WILDLIFE SERVICE. ViceAdmiral M.P. AVATI, PVSMV.S (Retd.) "PAWAN", P.O. Nirgodi, Phattan 415 528, Satara

I am putting on paper my views on the conservation and the protection of wildlife in India. Our wildlife stands on the brink of vanishing from our midst. The cheetah went more than fifty years ago, the tiger and the Asian elephant all have reached a point of no return in a few years. The snow leopard has all but vanished. Some of the high altitude ungulates, which were commonly seen in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh a few years ago, are now so rare that a sighting is considered an event. The Nilgiri black langur is now limited to a very few remote sholas in the high Nilgiris and other southern hills, the Eastern sarus has left India to recede eastwards into Vietnam and Cambodia, the black-necked crane is only an occasional visitor to Ladakh and even less occasional in the upper reaches of Arunachal Pradesh. I could go on like this indefinitely with this list of vanishing species, creatures which were fairly plentiful in their respective habitats in my father's days, less than 50 years ago. I wish to ask, "What will our sons and grandsons view in our wilds?" As a wag has said, "India will soon be left with only the cockroach, the crow and the creeper *Ipomea* as representatives of her once prolific wilds.

I blame the forest department for this state of affairs. An important contributory factor is undoubtedly the wild and unchecked growth of population. This problem is a political one, and therefore, regrettably, outside the purview of this letter. But I do believe that a reorganisation and a recasting of the role of the Forest Service will help considerably. As a first step this Service has to attend to the recruitment of its top cadres. It is currently haphazard in the extreme, a hit or miss affair, totally unfocussed on the tasks it has to discharge as Conservators of our forests and the wildlife which dwell in

them. In the examination for the Central Services there are few takers for the Forest Service. Most of the recruits join because they have no other option. They are neither Natural Science majors, nor are they interested in Botany, Zoology and subjects which a forester must be an expert in. In contrast to the disinterest of the gazetted officers, many of the junior field cadres are very good, dedicated to their duties. As an example, I wish to mention the name of Shri Pilariseth, a Range Officer (RFO) in Melghat Tiger Reserve whom I encountered on several occasions in the late 1980s. None of his superiors could hold a candle to him in his field knowledge of the Tiger and its habitat. All they did was to interfere with his work! There are several such RFOs in our forests. Their work and their dedication go unrecognised and unrewarded. Some chair-borne DFO or ACF takes the credit due to them, which is most aggravating and a disincentive to the hard pressed field staff who are working without adequate transport, communications, protective clothing and weapons against poachers. Today, poachers proliferate with the backing of their political masters. There is money in a tiger or a rhinoceros. The politicians are in on the racket. They have their poachers with high performance weapons, communications and other facilities. The intelligence comes from the ministers themselves! I know this for a fact. Often the senior forest officers are part of the mafia. The result then is a foregone conclusion.

What do we need to do? As a starter create an entirely new Indian Wildlife Service, recruited from young graduates in Natural Sciences who are genuinely committed to Wildlife conservation. There are, today, a large pool of such young people in India, thanks to a very rapidly growing awareness for conservation among the young. Let me cite the example of the vast congregation of viewers of Doordarshan's "Living on the Edge" programme. This programme has created a mini revolution in the thinking of the commitment of our younger generation. There are several in this generation who will gladly snap up the opportunity to join the proposed IWLS to be able to do their bit for wildlife conservation. Let us yoke this talent. The IFS then can revert to its revenue earning duties, from our forests, social forestry, monocultures and other tasks, divorced from wildlife conservation. There need be no clash between the two services because their duties will be divergent.

The next important task is to give a fresh motivation to the junior field staff, the forest guards, the range officers, etc. They must receive better remuneration, must be adequately clothed and shod, have working transport, good intercommunication and must be armed against poachers. They must have a good working knowledge of the law and its enforcement. Above all they must have a credible avenue for promotion. Not the least this staff must be well housed within a reserve or a range with

adequate facilities for the education of their children. The Forest Service, divested of its wildlife responsibilities will continue to police the forests, expanding the tree cover to areas which have been denuded, especially to the country's exterior wastelands, thereby providing forage, fodder and fuel to the common man in the villages. Where still practicable it can pursue its old revenue earning function through logging and sale of timber to industry and to private purchasers for their legitimate use. A great deal of pulpwood is required by the paper and the artificial fibre industries which is today garnered through channels which are not entirely legal and are harmful to the practice of a sensible national forest policy. The forest service will have enough on its hands without having to be diverted to looking after the protection of wildlife.

One last word in support of divesting the Indian Forest Service of its responsibilities to the conservation of wildlife in India. Look at what this service has done to put some dubious industrialisation programme ahead of the country's ecological interests in Gujarat. I am talking about the denotification of almost half of the area of the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary in Kutch, to construct cement plants which are supposed to export their product! It is the first National Sanctuary to be so denotified.

The Bombay Natural History Society must take up this question with the concerned Central Ministries to give a better deal to our surviving wildlife which is now 'Living on the edge' of extinction.



INFORMATION ABOUT COLOUR MARKED BIRDS.

DR TAEJ MUNDKUR, Publications & Information Officer, Wetlands International - Asia Pacific, 3A39, Block A, Kelana Centre Point, Jalan, SS7/19, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

During last 6 years a big program on study of gulls, terns, and waders, including ringing and colour marking, is continuing on the south of West Siberia. In total about 5000 birds of great black-headed gull (*Larus ichtyaetus*), common gull (*L. canus*), Herring gull (*L. cachinans*), Caspian tern (*Sterna caspia*) were marked with colour and metal rings. The rings were put on the tarsus or/and the tibia. We would be very thankful for any information about colour-ringed birds of this species.

The information should be sent to : A.K. Yurlov, Institute of Systematic and Animal Ecology SB RAS, Frunze str. 11, Novosibirsk-91, Russia, 630091. Email : Yurlov@zoo.nsk.su, Fax : 383-2-170793

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Cover : **Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*) Wades about the shallow margins of ponds or stalks insects in grass land. During monsoon they congregate at their traditional breeding grounds and prepare to build their nests on trees, with gossip conversations, accompanied by warning and mating calls.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS